The Courage to Hope

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The Courage to Hope

by Carrie_Poppins

Summary

Miwa expected it would take some time to earn the turtles' trust. What she did NOT expect was for them to earn her trust in return.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

The turtles were hesitant to trust her at first.

Miwa was alright with that. If anything, it showed good judgment; one shared battle did not an ally prove, after all. For all they knew, she was just an especially crafty *kunoichi* determined to play the long game and worm her way into the Hamato Clan's good graces before turning on them. But little by little, as Miwa fought by their side at the Worldwide Genome Project, slipped them Foot patrol routes, warned them of Stockman's and subsequently Shredder's interest in Kraang technology, and joined them for missions whenever she could, they began to relax.

It started with Leonardo. The blue-banded turtle had always seemed most inclined to give her the benefit of the doubt, but she didn't fail to notice when he started smiling at her more, or the way his eyes started to light up whenever she appeared. At some point, she started finding him loitering on rooftops whenever she snuck out for one of her midnight runs, like he had been waiting for her- Actually, that was probably exactly what he was doing. Miwa knew she shouldn't encourage him, but Leo's easy grin any time she joined him made it hard to want to stay away. She still tried to limit the time they spent together, wary of anyone seeing them, but sometimes time would slip away from her and she would discover that they had spent hours talking, sparring, or pretending to stargaze through the pea soup that was New York City smog and light pollution.

Miwa had the feeling she was getting in too deep somehow, but she wasn't sure that she wanted to stop.

Michelangelo was quickest to follow Leo's lead. Miwa would admit that she was more than a little bewildered when the youngest turtle introduced her to all of his toes, but Leo assured her that it was a great honor. It was actually kind of adorable how hard Mikey worked to make the *kunoichi* feel included, from his quest to help her discover her favorite kind of pizza to roping her into helping him prank Raphael and Donatello - Leo was usually off-limits for reasons that Miwa never really understood. Or maybe it wasn't that the leader was off-limits, it was just that Mikey preferred going after those that had a more explosive reaction. Which was actually fair; the cockroach incident was the first time Miwa had laughed out loud in years.

She couldn't help but wonder if this was what having a little brother was supposed to be like. She couldn't say that she disliked it.

Donatello came around next. Although all of the turtles had been cautious, the inventor was easily the most jumpy around Miwa when they first met - although to be fair, that may have mostly been a result of him frequently getting lost in his own head and not noticing her particularly-quiet footsteps when she approached. Her breakthrough with the purple-banded turtle came when she caught him staring at O'Neil a few times too often during training sessions, a faint blush coating his cheeks and a slightly dazed look in his eyes. The *kunoichi* hadn't expected her light, "Have you told her yet?" to prompt a full-on rant about how out of his league the redhead was, much less for Donnie to ask her for advice. But as he put it, "The guys only tease me and talking about this kind of thing with Sensei is just *awkward.* Besides,

I could really use a girl's perspective and you're literally the only girl I know who's not April." He was clearly desperate, so Miwa offered what little she could.

The next time she saw him, Donnie had built her a custom silver bracelet with a hidden communications module that connected to the turtles' T-phone network, so she figured that something she said must have helped.

But even with the metaphorical stamps of approval Miwa had received from Leo, Mikey, and Donnie, Raphael remained stubbornly aloof from her. It… hurt, in a way that she didn't expect, to continually be on the receiving end of his glares, for him to constantly be watching his brother's backs whenever she was around. Despite all of the times that she had fought by their sides, despite all of the times she had protected them, despite all of the information that she had given them, he still didn't trust her.

Why did that bother her so much? It wasn't like she had trusted *them* with everything, either. Yes, she trusted them to fight alongside her. She trusted them not to rat her out to the Foot. She even trusted them enough to… *relax* around them. To… To be *herself* with them.

She… She trusted them so much that sometimes it scared her.

"The issue is, we just don't have the right kind of weaponry to take down the stealth ship. It's too well armored!" Donnie groused, tapping at the elaborate computer system he had set up in the aptly-named Shellraiser.

Miwa blinked, forcing her mind back to the issue at hand: the Kraang stealth ship that had recently arrived through the TCRI portal.

"So then what are we supposed to do?" Leo frowned in thought, drumming his fingers against his arm. "That thing could destroy the city before anyone even knew it was there!"

"I could probably get us a missile launcher," the *kunoichi* suggested.

The turtles blinked at her.

"Shredder has *missile launchers?!"* Donnie gaped.

"Not yet, but he will shortly," Miwa explained. "He's accepting a shipment of weapons down at the docks tomorrow afternoon."

"Wait, does that mean Shredder's gonna be at the harbor tomorrow? *In person?"* Raphael spoke up, his emerald eyes slightly narrowed.

"Yes…?" the young woman replied, uncertain if she liked his tone.

The short turtle grinned ferociously. "Shredder, in person, out in the open, with nowhere to hide? Sounds like the perfect chance for an ambush to me."

Something even deeper than dread dropped into the pit of Miwa's stomach as thoughtful excitement began to cross each of the other turtles' faces. Take out Shredder? *Tomorrow?* But that would mean-!

“You can’t!” the *kunoichi* exclaimed.

“What?” Leo frowned.

“You can’t take down the Shredder, not yet!”

“Why not?”

“Y-You just- You just can’t,” the young woman stuttered, knowing how lame she sounded but unable to come up with a better excuse without… without telling the *truth.* Without revealing the one thing that she was determined to keep close to her chest. The one thing that she had to keep safe, no matter what. ~~(The one thing that had always been used against her.)~~

“So the truth comes out, is that it?” Raphael growled, standing up from his position in the driver’s seat.

“What?! No!” Miwa recoiled, horrified by the very implication. “I-I just-!”

“Just *what?!”* the red-banded turtle snapped back, frustration, anger, and suspicion pouring off of him in waves as he glowered at her, shoving Leo back when he made to step between them. “What is your *deal,* huh!? You come to us talking about how awful Shredder is, you say you wanna destroy him and his operations, but now that we have the perfect opportunity to end things once and for all, you’re bound and determined to defend him?! Make up your mind!! *Just whose side are you on?!?”*

“Raph-”

“I’ve already *told* you, I’m on *your* side!” the *kunoichi* fired back, refusing to back down even as her heart pounded with anxiety. “I want to stop him, too!”

“Guys-!”

“Then *why? Why* are you trying to get in our way??”

“Because he has my mother!!”

In an instant, the entire world froze. Miwa felt her anger turn to horror in a flash, paling at the realization of what she’d just revealed, at the sensation of four stunned gazes resting on her.

Michelangelo was the one who broke the impromptu stalemate, taking a step toward her. She automatically retreated, quickly dropping her eyes as her cheeks flushed with the shame of her instinctive reaction, her hands curling into fists at her sides. “I should go,” the *kunoichi* muttered through gritted teeth, turning towards the exit of the refitted subway car. She froze again when a large hand closed around her wrist.

“Wait! Harmony, wait,” Leonardo pleaded. “Don’t go. Just… Just talk to us. *Please.”*

Miwa took a deep breath, beating back her instinct to *run* by sheer force of will. “No, Leo. I’ve said too much already.”

“Haven’t said nearly enough, if you ask me,” Raphael huffed, but there was now a note of uncertainty in his tone.

“The more information we have, the better we can plan and prepare,” Donatello pointed out far too reasonably. “If we know what’s going on, then maybe-”

“There’s nothing *you* can do,” Miwa scoffed, tugging her wrist free, ignoring the small voice pleading, *What if?* in the back of her mind and making for the door. Mikey stepped in front of her before she could reach it, gazing up at her with clear, uncharacteristically serious blue eyes. The *kunoichi* stiffened, bracing herself for whatever came next.

She wasn’t expecting a hug.

It felt just like…

…Just like Mama’s.

“It’s okay, Harmony,” Mikey murmured against her shoulder, his voice low and gentle, his grip firm without being too tight. “You’re not alone anymore.”

The tears sprang to Miwa’s eyes unbidden. A small, strangled noise of surprise escaped her throat and she quickly pushed away from the shorter ninja, swiping at her eyes and hoping desperately that ~~they hadn’t seen~~ she hadn’t just smeared her makeup.

A light touch fell on her shoulder.

She hated that she ~~couldn’t pretend she hadn’t~~ flinched.

The hand pulled away, but the presence it belonged to did not. “Please, Harmony,” Leo murmured just behind her. “Trust us.”

The *kunoichi* wrapped her arms around her stomach, anxious about doing or saying anything stupid, like bursting into sobs or asking Michelangelo if he would hug her again or stepping away from Leo’s warmth because she *wasn’t scared* no matter how hard her heart was pounding or how tight her throat had become. “I *do* trust you,” she muttered, and even if it was the truth, it felt like ashes on her tongue.

“Then let us help you,” Donnie pleaded.

“It’s not that simple.”

“Then tell us *why,”* Raphael growled.

The *kunoichi* tightened her grip, the tips of her fingers pressing almost painfully into her own biceps. It didn’t matter that Leo and his brothers were the first real *allies* she’d ever had beyond her own mother. It didn’t matter that they were just like the *kappa* from her mother’s stories: sometimes bumbling and awkward, but kind and honorable and fiercely loyal to one another and those they cared about. It didn’t matter that she wanted, more than anything, to believe that they could rescue her and her mother from a *lifetime* of abuse and manipulation. This wasn’t something they could help her with.

But she didn't have a choice anymore. If she left them with only half the story, then there was a chance they would ignore her warning. That they would attack Shredder anyway, and if that happened…

With a long, shuddering sigh, Miwa finally let Leo guide her away from the exit. She plopped down in Raphael's usual seat, drawing her legs up to her chest and resting her chin between her knees, keeping her eyes stubbornly on the floor and away from any of the four gazes on her. ~~(If she met their eyes, she wasn't sure that she could continue keeping the tears at bay.)~~ Swallowing one last time and taking one last deep breath in an effort to settle her nerves, the *kunoichi* began.

"My father was a member of the Hamato Clan." A strange, choked sound came from somewhere to Miwa's left, quickly shushed by voices that she recognized as Leonardo's and Donatello's. "I can't remember him," she continued as though the interruption hadn't happened. "I don't even know his name; Shredder murdered him during his hostile revival of the Foot Clan when I was a baby, and my mother and I have lived under Shredder's thumb ever since.

"When I was young, Shredder used me to… to *control* my mother: limiting our time together, monitoring what little time we *did* have so that she couldn't tell me too much, training me more… more *harshly* when she wouldn't obey him. Then, as I got older and the Shredder realized my talent for martial arts, he started using similar tactics against me. My time with my mother was dependent on how well I did in training. Her safety was dependent on… on what I was willing to do in his name." Miwa paused and swallowed again, her eyes closing as she shuddered at the memory of some of the Shredder's *requirements.*

"A few months ago," she continued after finally composing herself, "when Shredder discovered the presence of the Hamato Clan in New York, he decided to bring me with him while leaving my mother in Tokyo, separating us to make sure we behave ourselves while he's preoccupied with all of you."

"Forgive me for saying this, but you haven't exactly been *behaving* from what we've seen," Donnie pointed out cautiously.

"Shredder's main goal was to make sure that we couldn't try to run away from him," Miwa smiled weakly before her eyes slid away again. "Leaving us together in Tokyo… I don't know for sure if we would have made it, but we definitely would have taken the chance. He's been ignoring me since we arrived though, so I had to try and do *something.* I couldn't… I couldn't just sit quietly by knowing that the Hamato Clan - my *father's* clan - was here."

"Okay, that's all well and good, but I still don't get why you don't want us to get rid of him," Raphael grumped without any of the edge she'd grown accustomed to. "If we can beat him, wouldn't that free your mom?"

"No," the *kunoichi* shook her head bitterly. "As much as I hate to admit it, despite everything that Shredder has done to my mother, he's still the only thing standing between her and execution."

"Execution??" Leo nearly choked on the word while Mikey asked Donnie what it meant in what he probably thought was a whisper. "Why?!"

"My mother isn't a part of the Foot Clan," Miwa explained. "Even if I never wanted it, I've earned a position there, so if Shredder were to keel over and die right now, despite my lineage, I would still have some measure of protection from whoever his successor might be as a member of the Foot.

"My mother has no such protection. To the rest of the clan, she's nothing more than Shredder's *pet.* Worse, she's the former wife of a high-ranking member of the Hamato Clan, the Foot's sworn enemy." Miwa swallowed, her voice trembling as she curled even further into herself. "I can't protect my mother from halfway around the world. If Shredder falls now, while I'm here in New York and she's still in Tokyo, she'll be dead long before I can reach her side."

The young woman released a harsh breath and quickly blinked back the remnants of her tears before she shot a dark glare at a tense, wide-eyed Raphael. "So that's it," she growled. "I can't let you kill Shredder, because it's a death sentence for my mother. Is that a good enough reason for you? Are you finally satisfied?"

Raphael flushed, irritation sparking in his emerald eyes before his gaze suddenly dropped from hers. "I didn't mean-! I mean I didn't want-! I-I just-!"

Leo silenced him with a hand on his shoulder, his sapphire eyes solemn as they turned to meet hers. "He means we're sorry," the eldest of the Hamato brothers spoke for everyone. "We understand now: no targeting Shredder directly. But Harmony, if Shredder ever comes after us himself…"

"I know," the *kunoichi* muttered, something dropping in the pit of her stomach. She knew they couldn't help her, and yet the disappointment, the sudden sense of helplessness, was almost unbearable. "I can't expect you to risk your lives for my mother's sake."

"I never said that."

Miwa's head shot up, her wide, golden eyes fixating on the blue-banded turtle's determined gaze.

"If Shredder comes after us, we will defend ourselves, but that doesn't mean we're not going to help you," Leo said firmly, ignoring the respectively skeptical and nervous glances from Raphael and Donnie, and the cheer of agreement from Mikey. "We'll help you find a way to save your mom, and when the chance comes, we'll be there to back you up."

Leo strode forward, crouching down in front of her and placing a light hand over her own. "We'll get her out, Harmony. We'll get *both* of you out. I swear it."

And he spoke with such a calm, fierce certainty that the only thing Miwa could possibly do was believe him.

End Notes

Yeah, Leo TOTALLY still has a crush on Miwa, although in this AU it's built much more on a foundation of "this is someone I like and think is really cool and really want to get to know better" instead of "she's hot and dangerous and something about that is really exciting". I'm honestly not sure if Miwa's "getting in too deep" comment is an implication of developing a crush of her own or if she's just having a "WAIT HOW DO I FRIEND???" crisis.

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